

May 24, 2022

The Honorable Pamela Pepper
Chief Judge, United States District Court
Eastern District of Wisconsin
United States Federal Building and Courthouse
517 E. Wisconsin Ave. Rm. 222
Milwaukee, WI 53202

RE: *United States of America v. Samy Mohammed Hamzeh*
Case No. 16-CR-21

Dear Honorable Judge Pepper:

I am writing this letter with regards to the above referenced case, seeking your kind consideration during the sentencing of Sammy Hamzeh.

I was “introduced” to Samy Hamzeh following the FBI press conference which accompanied his arrest in 2016. I did not know Samy Hamzeh before his arrest. At the press conference, the FBI alleged that Samy Hamzeh was planning on committing a domestic act of terrorism targeting the Humphrey Scottish Rite Masonic Center in downtown Milwaukee. As a leader of the Muslim community, I was upset and angry. Although I was relieved that a terrorist act was thwarted by the FBI, I knew that our community would once again be the recipients of false accusations and threats. Unfortunately, there are politicians and others in our country who reflexively assign collective guilt to the Muslim community whenever a “Muslim” is involved in planning or carrying out a violent crime.

Following the FBI press conference, I was involved with drafting the following press release on behalf of the Islamic Society of Milwaukee (ISM):

January 26, 2016
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

It is being widely reported that Sammy M. Hamzeh has been arrested following an investigation by the FBI’s Milwaukee office. The Islamic Society of Milwaukee leadership is not familiar with Sammy Hamzeh and he is not a recognized attendee of any of our facilities. The Islamic Society and its members are deeply troubled by the allegations that Sammy Hamzeh wanted to attack the Scottish Masonic Temple in downtown Milwaukee.

While we respect the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, we fully support law enforcement efforts to apprehend dangerous individuals of any background.

The Islamic Society of Milwaukee condemns all violent extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. Targeting civilians’ lives and property is forbidden in Islam. Further, it is the civic and religious duty of Muslims to cooperate with law enforcement authorities and protect the lives of all civilians. We pray for the safety and security of our country and community and we will continue to work in partnership with law enforcement.

Our position on those who advocate violence is clear and unequivocal and there was no sympathy for Samy.

Some days after Samy was arrested, I was contacted by his mother and father. Although I recognized them as attendees of our mosque on 13th and Layton, I did not know them personally or by name, nor did I know that they were Samy's parents.

I subsequently met Samy's mother, father and sister. During multiple visits to my office, I politely listened to their stories about their family, including Samy. They told me about the difficulties and hardships that the family faced in Jordan and in the United States. They told me that Samy was a "good son and brother" who was a financial provider for the family. They also told me about Samy's involvement with several young men who they thought were Samy's friends but who were later found out to be confidential informants (CIs). (I recognized the name of one of the CIs from his prior "activities" in the community, activities which got him barred from coming to the Islamic Center).

I have continued to closely follow Samy's case since the 2016 indictment and I have had the opportunity to learn much more about Samy. When Samy was eventually released from jail pending trial (after thirty months of incarceration), he made a point to visit me in my office. Samy wanted to tell me his story and to get my advice on a variety of issues. Over the years, I have continued to have periodic conversations with Samy. I witnessed Samy become a regular attendee at our mosque, particularly during the early morning and night prayers (before and after his work hours). Samy was also comfortable discussing some of his life plans with me. For example, he wanted to get married, but was worried about the impact on his family if he was to face future incarceration. I was happy when Samy contacted me to inform me about his marriage plans and as the years progressed, he proudly spoke to me about the birth of each of his children.

During the course of his case, I continued to have multiple conversations with Samy. Following discussions with his legal team, Samy spoke to me about his desire to proceed to trial. Having practiced law for many years, I felt that Samy's matter presented a strong case of entrapment based on pleadings and news reports that I had seen.

I believe that the most significant element in Samy's case was that Samy clearly rejected the plot being promoted by the CIs. In response to the relentless efforts of the CIs, Samy sought the advice of Imams who reinforced Samy's beliefs that the attacks being promoted by the CIs were haram (religiously forbidden). It is important to mention that Samy did not need the advice of the Imams to convince *himself* that the plot was wrong. Samy was seeking the religious authority of the Imams to reinforce his beliefs and convince his "friends" that the plot was wrong.

Samy approached me a few months ago after communicating with his legal team about a new offer he received from the government. Samy told me that he was prepared to accept responsibility for charges related to the weapons and he was strongly considering the latest government offer. Samy told me that he accepted responsibility for making stupid and absolutely unacceptable statements and remarks to his "friends" and for getting involved in

matters that he should have avoided. Samy recognized that he was no longer a very young, immature, impressionable and irresponsible individual. He was now a married man. He was a father. He was a caretaker of his parents and a supporter of his siblings. Samy told me he wanted to go on with his life and did not want to take the chance of facing a long incarceration that would separate him from his wife and children and other family members. As an attorney and a leader of the Muslim community, I would have liked to see Samy take this case to trial. But this case is not about me or the Muslim community. It is about Samy. I informed Samy that I agreed with his decision, based on his strong desire to move on with his life.

Honorable Judge Pepper: although I originally took a very strong and harsh stance against Samy, I have come to believe that he is a truly decent, hardworking and principled young man. Sammy has matured into a loving husband, a kind father, a responsible son and a protective brother. Samy has been out on bond for close to four years and his record has been exemplary. If I felt that Samy posed ANY threat to our community or to our country, I would not write a reference letter for him. I am confident that Samy will carry out the rest of his life in an honorable, law-abiding manner.

I kindly ask that you sentence Samy to time already served and allow him to continue his life with his family. Your consideration is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Othman Atta
Executive Director,
Islamic Society of Milwaukee